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# Iran-contra concerns stalling confirmation of Gates to CIA post

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WASHINGTON — Robert M. Gates, President Reagan's nominee to head the CIA, is encountering unexpected difficulties in the Senate amid concerns that his role in the Iran-contra affair may have been more extensive than previously realized.

Influential lawmakers said yesterday that they were reluctant to vote on Gates' confirmation until congressional investigators had had time to examine the involvement of Gates and the CIA in the Iran-contra operation. That examination could take months, dashing administration hopes for a speedy confirmation.

The Senate Intelligence Committee was expected to vote next week on the confirmation, but officials there have adopted a "wait and see" attitude.

In a statement issued yesterday, Intelligence Chairman David L. Boren (D., Okla.) and Vice Chairman William S. Cohen (R., Maine) said the committee would hold another hearing on Gates Wednesday and then decide how to proceed with his confirmation.

Gates' nomination had been expected to win swift approval from the Senate, but his two days of testimony last week raised doubts about whether he attempted to keep important aspects of the Iran-contra affair from Congress.

Sources who were once optimistic that the Senate would approve Gates' nomination now say his confirmation is in jeopardy.

"Most people aren't prepared to vote now," said Sen. Sam Nunn (D., Ga.), a member of both the Senate Intelligence Committee and the special committee investigating the Iran-contra affair. "I agree with the spirit of delaying it."

Former Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman David Durenberger (R., Minn.) said it may be advisable for Reagan to submit a new nominee — one who "didn't have anything to do with the Iran-contra thing" — if it appears that Gates' confirmation will be held up indefinitely. But Durenberger said he hoped the Senate would act quickly to confirm Gates.

The concern being expressed by several senators is that they do not want to be put in a position of voting on Gates' confirmation and then be confronted with damaging disclosures about him.

Senators who are advocating a delay in the confirmation say there is little to lose by adopting such an approach because Gates, in the meantime, would continue as acting CIA director.

"He'll be there doing his work, but put there by the President, not by us," said Sen. Alan Cranston (D., Calif.), an Intelligence Committee member.

Those supporting a delay include Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D., W. Va.) and the chairman and vice chairman of the Senate Iran-contra investigative committee, Sens. Daniel K. Inouye (D., Hawaii) and Warren H. Rudman (R., N.H.).

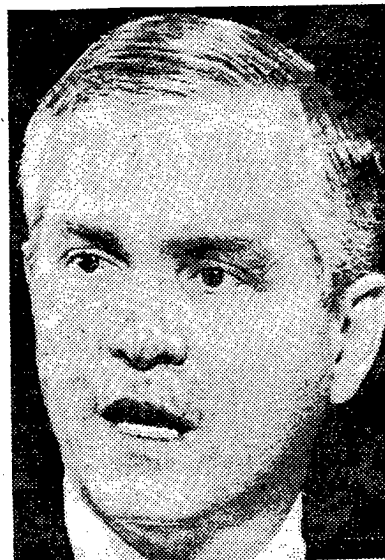
Gates, a career intelligence officer, served as the number-two official in the CIA for most of 1986. He became acting director in December when former Director William J. Casey was hospitalized with a brain tumor.

Critics of Gates have questioned whether he was forthcoming with Congress in November when the details of the Iran arms deal began to surface. Sen. Arlen Specter (R., Pa.) charged yesterday that Gates might have been involved in an effort to cover up important aspects of the Iran-contra affair.

"You really have a whole pattern here of calculated concealment," said Specter, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Specter faulted Gates for his role in preparing testimony by Casey that failed to mention the possible diversion of funds from the Iran arms deal to the anti-government rebels in Nicaragua.

Specter also said that an unpublished report by the CIA inspector general's office on the CIA's role in the Iran-contra affair raises "very significant" questions about the competency of Gates. Specter would not elaborate.

Other lawmakers have been far less critical of Gates, but nevertheless appear leery of endorsing him for fear that the Tower commission report being released today or subsequent investigations could prove damaging.



Robert M. Gates  
CIA nominee in difficulty